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Board of Labor...

The labor exchange of
England

[Boston]

[1915]

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THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
STATE BOARD OF LABOR
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THE LABOR EXCHANGE OF ENGLAND



REPORT OF JOHN S. LAWRENCE
SPECIAL REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
STATE BOARD OF LABOR AND INDUSTRIES

MAY, 1915



STATE BOARD OF LABOR

AND INDUSTRIES

ALFRED W. DONOVAN, Chairman

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MRS. DAVIS R. DEWEY

DR. A. H. QUESSY

EDWIN MULREADY,

Commissioner of Labor

MP 22 Nov 16

To the Massachusetts State Board of Labor and Industries

I first want to thank you for the commission of introduction your Board so kindly gave me. It was of the greatest assistance to me. An introduction from the State of Massachusetts is second only to an introduction from the United States of America.

You have asked for some information concerning the English Labor Bureau and I enclose copies of the law forms and reports which make interesting studies, and I commend them to you. I also enclose a form of inquiry used by a typical manufacturer whose name I should prefer not to have made public.

I am of the opinion that this English labor exchange is working to the advantage of all and to the economic advantage of the country.

The cost for advertising for labor or positions has been practically eliminated, labor has been efficiently transported from one centre to another, thus relieving overcrowding or under-manning of certain sections. This has been especially helpful during the present crisis when some industries are closed, others running night and day.

It is especially interesting to note that the Exchange Commission advance money when required for transportation of labor, and only 4% of the money advanced has not been returned.

I had a most interesting interview with Mr. Beveredge, who is in charge of the work in London. He told me that the pension systems were an addition to the labor exchanges, but not an essential part of them, and in order to operate any pension system labor exchanges of some sort were a necessity.

The general policy of these exchanges was to serve only as an introduction, and if employer or employee asked any question they were only answered by the consent of the other. In cases of sending labor to strike centres they did so only after the full facts were told to the labor who were being forwarded, and the unions made no objection to this. The success of the bureau he felt was due to their taking no responsibility, merely serving as a clearing house and assisting introductions.

I am of the opinion that such a law drafted for our state would be most useful but should not be urged until labor unions, the press, the Chamber of Commerce and the State executives had agreed to support it.

Of special interest to me was the labor condition in England during war times. I should estimate that fully one-third of the population of Great Britain was directly working and being supported by the war office. The most vigorous men have enlisted, the sporting men of military age are practically all dead, and every mechanic and many who are not mechanics are at work on war munitions. Many railroad gangs have been sent to France to build and repair railroads; many coal miners have enlisted and a shortage of coal is feared. Much rolling stock (of the practically now Government railroad) is in France and much is always loaded with munition for the fleet ready to proceed to the desired ports. Equipment, transportation of troop munition and wounded make freight service almost impossible.

It must be remembered that the fighting front is manned by about one man to every front foot, and it is only modern control of man over power that makes it possible to efficiently employ such masses. Men who can handle mechanics, the lathe, the forge, the engineers, the auto drivers, are in greatest demand, and England is suffering today for no systematic use of those who can handle such work, because their system of enlistment has permitted many to do ordinary trench fighting who would be very much more effective in other manners.

Should the United States be drawn into this issue I trust the State of Massachusetts will see to it that the mechanic be registered and scientifically employed, and it should also be made profitable for plants to equip for military requirements.

I found in England a great shortage of all labor. In London the beggars had disappeared; hotels, restaurants, shops, docks and everywhere there were requests for more labor. Retail trade was splendid and the demand so exceeded the supply of much merchandise that salesmen had been withdrawn to assist production and assorting.

The papers and the employers were full of comment of the advance in wages and consequent loss of individual efficiency and increase in drink. These two things are the most serious, students of the subject admit, for the future of England. The adjustment to meet international competition, when the war offices are no longer large purchasers, will of necessity be slow and most difficult.

Had England come to compulsory industrial conscription she would have been much better off.

In passing let me note that all over England were being held exhibitions of German pro-

ductions in quantities to stimulate the capturing of foreign trade. But England has no labor to build nor to maintain further industry, and there are certain of these industries America will and should seek if it were not unneutral; and may I say even if it were, I urge the co-operation of your body to open such exhibitions and to assist principally in securing better insurance rates and shipping from Boston.

I should be very glad to meet your Commission as soon as a time can be arranged and talk with them about this situation much more thoroughly than I can possibly write it.

Yours very truly,

JOHN S. LAWRENCE.

Boston, Mass.

May 18, 1915.

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